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'The Best Time is Now!': The Temporal and Spatial Dynamics of Women Opting in to Self-Employment

Linda McKie, Ingrid Biese and Marjut Jyrkinen

This paper explores the potential for the concepts of time and space, together with the analogy of landscapes, to aid the exploration and understandings of women's careers. Drawing upon case studies of women who chose to opt in to self-employment, we examine how the multi-faceted histories of these women are drawn upon as they remember the past, explain contemporary experiences, and anticipate their futures. All the women spoke of opting in to self-employment as the best of times; they talked of greater control over work content, the relationship between family, gender and paid work, and self-determinism and autonomy. They noted times when their careers were frayed but only in retrospect could they assess the context, consequences and impact of events. The framework of careerscapes — our unique blending of the notion of careers along with socio-economic and geographical interpretations of scapes—offers a framework to examine frayed careers and multiple aspects of working and caring over time and space.

Introduction

In the call for contributions to this special issue, the guest editors draw our attention to 'the stages of working life (lives) as interlinked and biographic: marking... recurrent hurdles on a meandering path'. This description of rhythms in careers as recurrent experiences presenting hurdles and opportunities reinforces the need to explore time, space and agency across careers; how women identify, embrace or traverse challenges in their work and life. We examine these issues through an analysis of interviews with six women who opted out of their corporate careers to opt in to self-employment. Their decision to follow this pathway was based on interpretations of past experience; an assessment of current and future work and family needs, combined with the potential to control career decisions at that point in time. Women spoke of patterns and rhythms in their careers. Aspects of life and work were defined and prioritized in different ways over the years and across locations and spaces. As our title suggests, reflecting on their career histories and hopes led interviewees to talk of this as 'the best time'.

The women interviewees are residing in two European Union (EU) member states, Finland and Scotland (UK). Both countries have a similar population size (over 5 million) with a concentration of around 40 per cent of the population in the south of each country. At the same time, large remote and sparsely populated areas pose particular issues for service delivery and economic development. Women make up half of the workforce in Finland and in Scotland, but 81 per cent in Finland work full-time, while this is the case for 59 per cent of Scottish women (Romans and Kotecka, 2007; Scottish Government, 2007). This notable contrast is due in part to the Finnish provision of universal day care and a parental leave system. This enables either of the parents to stay home until their child is three years old although only 6.1 per cent of parental leave days are used by fathers (Haataja, 2009).

In the UK, around 38 per cent of managers are women and this figure is 36 per cent in Finland; the average across the EU is 33 per cent (Lyly-Yrjänäinen and Fernández Macías, 2009). On the other hand, nearly 40 per cent of employees have a woman as their immediate superior in Finland, which is the highest rate in the EU. Despite trade union and business initiatives to the contrary, the dominant business culture in both countries can be described as 'globalized forms of work', with long working hours and relatively inflexible work patterns. The trend and culture of long-hours and 'presentism' discourages some women (and men) who want to both work and raise a family (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2008), or to include a wider range of activities other than paid work and career building. In Finland, 30 per cent of entrepreneurs are women, and 60 per cent of their businesses are located in service sectors (Ministry of Employment and the Economy, 2008). In Scotland 31.3 per cent of the self-employed are women (Scottish Government, 2009). Self-employment among women is growing and actively promoted for all adults across the EU.

In earlier work, Belkin (2003) suggested that women are opting out of corporate life, seeking to articulate what Blair-Loy (2003) terms 'competing devotions' to better combine the multi-faceted worlds of home, family and career. The notion of opting out was challenged by the work of Cohen *et al.* (2004, p. 414) who contend there is a push factor out of corporate life. This results from organizational cultures, which are constraining, expecting presentism and long hours in and out of the office, and gendered, lacking flexibility in working conditions and practices (Stone, 2007).

Heilman and Chen (2003) reviewed a range of studies on the experiences of women and minorities in corporate life. Frustrations and discontent are factors in the decision to move into entrepreneurship. However, they conclude that whilst attractive, self-employment also brings challenges (Heilman and Chen, 2003, p. 360) 'although entrepreneurship can provide individuals with a way to gain career autonomy and control, it does not necessarily provide an escape from all the problems that women and minorities face in the business world.' Was the decision of our women interviewees to opt out about placing greater emphasis on their priorities? Did opting out to opt in to their own business give women power to determine the content and timing of their working lives? Entrepreneurship appeared to support women's time-space continuum at this point in time. These women had opted in to their own company in mid and later career, and they spoke of consolidating experiences, recognizing turning points and managing changes imposed through economic circumstance or a change in personal and family life. Their own company, they argued, can best facilitate whatever is happening in their lives. In short, their business accommodates their rhythms.

To explore these issues, the paper opens with a review of the ways in which careers have been labelled and analysed. Following this, we consider time and space in depth, arguing that these concepts and trends are necessary to any examination of the rhythms of women's careers. The research study from which data are drawn is then introduced and subsequently we present data drawing out the similarities and differences in the temporal and spatial shifts

to opting in. We end the paper by reflecting on the potential for frayed careers to be explored through the lens of the over-arching framework of 'careerscapes'. As the guest editors note, not enough attention has been paid to the rhythmicity of careers and what happens at transition stages or during transformations. Often we look at a career experience or option that has unravelled, and in retrospect we identify frayed, gendered experiences. Career scapes expands this analytical framework by offering a broader approach, drawing upon temporal and spatial dimensions as we recall, anticipate and experience work and home life. These are not linear thoughts or processes but multifaceted, as we move between present, past and future. Further, personal, family and care experiences change with age, environment, economic and sectoral contexts, including the intersectionalities of social class, race and ethnicity.

To explore these temporal, spatial and gendered rhythms, we draw upon the analytic potential of time, space and gender to identify and explore the experienced and imaginary landscapes of women's careers (Adam, 1998; Appadurai, 1996). In this task we are supported by the work of Appadurai (1996, p. 44) who asserts that our 'search for certainties is regularly frustrated by the fluidities of transnational communication' as well as the disjuncture and difference in cultural and economic experiences. Further, Adam's (1998) work brought attention to the multi-layered nature of time and how common perceptions of clock and calendar time mask the myriad ways in which we experience time as we reflect on past, present and future at one and the same time. We can speculate about opportunities or barriers, for example, to potential promotion, often perceiving elements of both dimensions. Or, memories may be recalled and replayed in completing an application for a new job. Thus we transcend current clock time in many ways, and these perceptions of time are both gendered and skewed by our age, relationship, familial status and social situation and characteristics. For instance, thoughts about opportunities for promotion and life plans may seem stable for a white, middle-class woman in her thirties working for a transnational company located in Finland, who is able to draw upon maternity policies and provision. By contrast, for a woman of similar age and qualifications working for a small company on a fixed-term contract in the UK, the future of her job may be unsure if she takes maternity leave. Both women draw upon national perceptions of legislation and rights over time, but this knowledge is viewed through their interpretations of what they see, hear and anticipate in that particular space and context. Further, these perceptions, and resultant decisions, reflect their social class, economic and geographical location, race/ethnicity and family context. Their temporal-spatial routes are gendered with resultant implications for career plans, work and family life. Whilst aware of EU-wide policies on equality and social issues, they reach differing conclusions as to what is possible at this point in their respective careers.

Our analytical framework brings together the noun 'career' (discussed in more detail in the following section) and the term 'scapes'. This latter term draws attention to the notion of a 'landscape', and whilst we may think of this as static, our perceptions differ across the day as, for example, the sun rises, rain showers come and go, sun and then clouds herald nightfall. The seasons

provide rhythms too. Natural or man-made changes to the landscape also impact on our perceptions, and thus experiences of the terrain. Drawing on this analogy, we can explore how women traverse time and space in multi-faceted ways, buffeted by economic, social or political change. Whilst each of us has a unique careerscape, these will illuminate the multi-faceted manner in which we are doing gender, doing paid and unpaid work, addressing hurdles and exploring opportunities. Thus we assert that combining the term 'career' with the notion of 'scapes' to form 'careerscapes', offers new ways to consider the diverse and inter-weaving experiences and anticipations of working lives.

Identifying and exploring careers

The exploration of careers has generated numerous studies and analytical possibilities moving from, among other things, the linear to the kaleidoscopic, and the patchwork to the boundaryless career models. These concepts offer a range of labels and ideas. Each presents the researcher with a lens through which women's careers may be examined. We assert, however, that as economic context, demographic trends and women's participation in labour markets has grown, the challenge is to develop a framework to explore the interplay of life and work over time and space across the increasing span of careers.

Early analysis generated the notion of the linear career. Whilst discernible in larger companies, in recent decades this concept has come in for criticism, reflecting a largely masculinist route to advancement and is rarely found today given changes in employment patterns (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2010; Rosenbaum, 1979; Wilensky, 1964). The notion of the kaleidoscopic career by Mainiero and Sullivan (2006) allows for an explanation of the multidimensional, cyclic nature of a woman's life and career. Premised on three parameters — challenge, balance and authenticity — they assert these are present and interact with different levels of importance depending on where a woman is in her life and career. However, in this ever-changing world, which has added an element of constant change and reinvention (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), the notion of stages or phases in careers are no longer bound to any particular age, nor linearity even through cycles (see Wethington, 2000).

The boundaryless career offers a description of contemporary careers (Arthur and Rousseau, 1996). This can encompass a career across several employers or sectors, but also careers that involve movement out of the labour market for varying amounts of time; the latter, as we will show, being more relevant to the rhythmic, cyclical patterns of women's careers and to the women who chose to opt out and in. An important aspect of the boundaryless career is the fuzzy boundaries between different areas of life. Communication technologies, flexible working and economic constraints have led to increasingly blurred boundaries between work and home, between the public and private (Rotkirch, 2003). Whilst an accurate description of numerous careers, it does not sufficiently explain how experiences can impact on decisions over time and space; for example, the ways in which experiences of being a young woman in a predominantly male organization provides memories which may be refined and yet continue to impact on work-life decisions in later years.

Patchwork careers provide a focus on boundaries and situations where the person takes up different kinds of work tasks. Career choices are explored through the weaving together of work, lifestyle and goals for self-fulfilment (see Blossfeld *et al.*, 2006; Halrynjo, 2009). This career type is said to consist of a variety of selected jobs and (often) short-term, part-time contracts which are both simultaneous and serial. The patch-worker uses her or his multiple skill sets and interests to collate a mosaic of life. This kind of precarious career celebrates freedom and independence. However, patchwork careers do not represent nor describe a holistic view of life and career.

Drawing further upon this analysis, Cohen *et al.* (2004, p. 409) assert that a career is not conceptualised as a form or structure that an individual temporarily inhabits, constraining or enabling her in her journey. Rather, it is constituted by the actor herself, in interaction with others, as she moves through time and space. However, this is not to suggest that individuals have a free rein as to how they enact their careers ... It is an iterative and on-going process, involving at times the reproduction of existing structures and at times their transformation.

The work of Cohen *et al.* alerts us to the multi-faceted processes in the evolution of careers. In addition to drawing upon this work, our framework adds to the potential for analysis: careerscapes incorporates the time and space continuum with a holistic view of life, including gendered differences in pay, and the nature of paid and unpaid work, as well as private spheres of responsibilities and relationships. These various ways of analysing careers are evident in any discussion of frayed careers. However, how might we move to an over-arching framework to develop analysis? We now turn to the concepts of time and space, exploring how the notion of time and landscapes can assist in the exploration of women's careers.

Careerscapes

Whilst each of the above offers analytic potential, we assert that to explore gendered rhythms in careers over the decades requires a deeper appreciation of the concepts of time and space. Melucci (1996, p. 11) argues that 'our experience of time rarely if ever coincides with what the clock tells us ... [the] relation between past, present and future constitutes a question that addresses the very roots of individuality.' He considers the notion of the 'rhythms' of nature, such as the seasons, and the weaving of time together so that repetition and change are conjoined. However, these rhythms are circumscribed by the relationship between time and space in capitalism (Melucci, 1996, p. 14):

everything can be measured, divided and calculated using the standard yardstick of quantity. Work ethic, militancy, accumulation, saving — these are all patterns of behaviour typical of industrial culture. They are orientated towards a goal and based on the idea that the time will eventually come when everything so laboriously striven for will be finally acquired and enjoyed.

The organization of the life cycle and capitalism intersect and mutually inform and influence one another through the formation of families, the bearing of children, and participation in education, training and employment. Flaherty (2011, p. 11) uses the term 'time work' to refer to the 'intrapersonal and

interpersonal effort directed toward provoking or preventing various temporal experiences'. The central tenet of Flaherty's argument is the need to explore the relationship between determinism and self-determination; to what extent can any of us construct a purposive career plan given the 'textures' of time and temporal experiences?

'Time work' for women in managerial careers will shift from the practical, day-to-day clock time of getting from home to work, to calendar time exemplified in taking a child or elder for ongoing medical investigations and regular check-ups, to reflective multiple times in which experiences, speculations, stresses and expectations come together in the decision to take a training course or apply for a promotion (Menzies, 2005). In all of this, women will be moving between spaces — not merely the physicality of space evident in the office or home but also the space of our thoughts and social relations. Careerscapes incorporate stormy times and cloudy days and the cause of these may be customer/client relations, a general dissatisfaction with managers or colleagues or limited development opportunities. Times and landscapes are changing too due to legislation, policy, wider economic and cultural forces such as demographic transformations. For example, whilst a national government may legislate for the right to request flexible working to aid women's careers, employers may not be wholly supportive. Or, current demands for longer stay in working life contradict gendered ageism (Jyrkinen and McKie, 2012). Such attitudes become apparent in the organizational culture rather than any written policy or document. Women become aware of these contrasting cultural and organizational nuances, which require manoeuvring over and across the resultant 'hills' and 'valleys' in the careerscape. Here we draw attention to the power imbalances evident across most organizations and the ways in which women are at one and the same time pushed and pulled; pushed from workplaces where senior posts continue to elude most women, and pulled towards possibilities that offer more control and satisfaction over work-life. Women's, particularly women managers', turnover decisions have been found to be associated with their perceived perceptions of limitations to their career opportunities (Mano-Negrin, 2003; Stroh *et al.*, 1996).

Massey (2005, p. 6) draws a distinction between space and place, the latter providing both a haven and also an inherent challenge; the place of home, the place of women, the place of trade unions. Time, space and place, which all are gendered, draw us to the imaginations of the human condition and of how we move between the concrete and unconscious. Massey (2005, p. 17), drawing on the work of Lefebvre (1991), argues that we have inherited 'an imagination so deeply ingrained' that we rarely recognize the interplay of these influences. In more recent work Lefebvre (2004, p. 9) draws attention to the notion of rhythms:

Time and space, the cyclical and the linear, exert a reciprocal action: they measure themselves against one another; each one makes itself and is made a measuring measure; everything is cyclical repetition, linear repetitions.

Flaherty (2011, p. 132) draws parallels between gender and time, noting how people manage the 'routine, methodical and recurring accomplishment of gendered lives'. Sabelis *et al.* (2008, p. 427) note how individual choices can reinforce gendered inequality; our imaginary landscape of freedom to work from home when children are on school holidays or an elder is ill 'do not make even the slightest dent in the existing collective gender order that reproduces gender inequality'. Women continue to take prime responsibilities for unpaid care whilst in paid employment. Likewise, how we think about and address time and space is also routine, methodical and a recurring accomplishment. Some of the time people try to shape their paths through time and space so as to realize particular aims and goals. But for many, at least some career pathways are ill-defined, taken for granted or restricted by the availability of resources, income and services.

Given these concerns how might we examine the spaces, places and timings of lives and careers? And of women's careers with the attendant issues of biology, care and family work, and unpaid domestic labour? Here we move beyond the notion of a 'landscape'; we agree with Massey (2005, p. 138) that landscapes cannot be disciplined, and as researchers we continue to grapple with complexities of people's lives and the thorny issue of agency and self-determination in the gendered practices of social and employment structures. Thus a woman in her twenties may commence training with a career in mind but over time find that the daily realities differ from expectations. This may be due to the organizational context, the practices of colleagues, male and female, changes in her personal life, and increasing knowledge of the content of the actual job or profession. Over time, across places of work, the physical and psychological spaces of mind and body, a careerscape becomes evident; often in retrospect. However, two decades on and in her forties, an employer restructures and the woman finds herself redundant or keen to leave. The notion of the frayed career provides analytical opportunities, and in conjunction with careerscapes can offer depth and breadth in the analysis of careers, taking into account past, present and future in fluid and rhythmic ways.

The study

The six interviews presented in this paper as short case studies are drawn from a larger data set of a project on gender, age and diversity among women managers in Finland and Scotland.¹ This comprised 25 interviews (15 in Finland and 10 in Scotland) and four focus groups (two in each country) with women managers undertaken in 2009. The selection criteria, applied in both countries, were that participants held a senior managerial position² in a business or a non-governmental organization, and that they were aged 30 or over. The sampling was purposive given the potentially sensitive nature of talking about women's careers whilst in the midst of these. Ethical issues were carefully considered throughout the project. Consent was sought at every stage and the guidelines of learned societies and funders adhered to (British Sociological Association, 2002; Academy of Finland, 2010). Interviews were structured around the themes of career phases; organizational policies and relationships with work colleagues; mentors and networks,³ families and

futures. These themes in the interview schedule were derived from the vast body of research on women in management, while taking into account the relative paucity of attention paid to the impact of gender, age and gendered ageism on women's managerial careers (Acker, 2006; Calasanti, 2005; Itzin and Phillipson, 1995; Stone, 2007).

All interviews were tape-recorded and transcribed, 4 and the six case study interviews yielded 160 pages of text. A research diary and notes informed analysis through reflection on the context and environment of interviews. A summary of the key characteristics of the interviewees is presented in Table 1.

The authors developed the coding schedule through reading and re-reading transcripts of these six interviews. Coding was further refined in conjunction with a review of the research diary and field notes. The themes presented below dominated the narratives as women explored the iterative and ongoing processes of changing career(scapes), namely, the recurrent rhythms of gender in organizational cultures, care and home, and the search for autonomy, self-determination, leading to 'the best of times'. Many of us try to plan a career or promotion path, but these 'plans' are rarely realized as first envisaged. Women spoke of the challenges and dilemmas posed by paid and unpaid work, relationships, children, relatives, friends and the search for personal and leisure time. Care, in its myriad forms—for colleagues undergoing personal stresses, for children as they grow, for elders as they age, for partners and friends — was found across narratives. Over time, places and spaces, the pressures to manage work–life issues came to the fore and the notion of career plans became discursive. Although all the women were highly qualified, they still witnessed male colleagues and relatives promoted faster and further. Thus the classic notion of meritocracy, actively promoted by governments and employers for much of the last 50 years, seems unable to address aspects of gendered work practices as these unfold over time and space across the decades of working life in highly gendered ways.

Table 1: Key Characteristics of Women Interviewees

Pseudonym	Nature of own business	Age group	Education	Partnership status	Children	Location
Samantha	Management	50s	College	Co-habiting with partner	Teenage stepchild	Finland
Sara	Tourism	50s	University	Divorced	1 grown-up child living away from home	Finland
Phyllis	Management	60s	University	Married for second time	3 children and grandchildren	Finland
Cate	Media	40s	College	Single	None	Scotland

Heather	Management	40s	University	Married	1 child	Scotland
Pat	Marketing	40s	University	Married	3 children	Scotland

Gendered landscapes and careers

Sara now runs her own tourism business. She is in her 50s, Finnish, divorced with one grown-up child. From the outset of her interview she spoke of entrepreneurship as a good option — the best option — as it allows her to do things on her own terms and to her full potential, giving her control over the conditions of her work; how she works and with what. Her experiences of corporate practices were largely negative as she felt she had been bypassed due to her age and her gender. Whilst she enjoyed the content of her job, she felt she did not receive just rewards or recognition, largely down to what she identified as a gendered culture described thus:

Women had a really hard time advancing there [name of company] ... and one just had to realize that there are no opportunities. That was it, because it was obvious that young men came there [were recruited] all the time, who didn't know anything about anything and they were right away considered better ... or they were at least paid better. (Sara)

As time went by, Sara began to feel she was becoming too old and experienced to deal with ongoing gendered discrimination, as she felt male leaders could not handle women with more knowledge and skills than themselves. One particular turning point was the publication of a report she worked on where her name had been removed from the list of authors for no apparent reason other than that her contribution was not considered noteworthy. In contrast, her own company allows her to sink or swim on her own merits and 'she has free hands' to progress as she wishes.

Pat, in her 40s, living in Scotland, spoke frankly about the gendered nature of space and time experienced over two decades of a career in marketing in the construction and engineering industries:

[Discrimination] was to some degree disguised in that the people who run the business were engineers and all engineers tended to be men, so the people in management positions were men and also engineers. So, theoretically if you were a woman engineer, you could have become a manager, but in actual fact you know, there were no women engineers ... to get to the top you worked out on site and these are very difficult places to work.... there was an awful lot of direct and indirect discrimination ... when I joined I was asked how would I cope with a man making a pass at me at a business function! ... you know they won't be asking a male candidate that question. (Pat)

Across the spaces of construction and engineering sites, gendered practices were evident and recreated.

At the same time, government legislation, industry guidelines and company practices encouraged women to consider a career in these male domains of engineering and construction. After witnessing and experiencing numerous incidents of sexist behaviour over 20 years, Pat left rather than make an

official complaint, suspecting that it would not change anything, but would only limit her possibilities even further in the company. Whilst she felt she had enough evidence to make a legal claim for gender discrimination, this seemed to be impossible given the potential to be labelled as a 'trouble-maker', a label that is very hard to shake. In organizations, the structural factors of gender discrimination are often disguised and discrimination is perceived as a purely individual problem (Meyerson and Fletcher, 2000). There was also limited support from the few women in the industry, and Pat spoke of sensing a 'fight for survival' that lead to hostility among some women. Now working in her own business as a consultant to the industry she continues to witness gendered practices:

What I went on to learn was that senior managers were all members of two golf clubs ... And both are exclusively male! Male networks are so established. Women's networks ... don't have much power. (Pat)

Women in Finland noted the power of networking among men in the sauna as a physical space where women are excluded. Thus, whether a golf club or sauna — both culturally specific gendered spaces—men in business continue to inhabit spaces in which power is (re)created over time. Women continue to be excluded from some spaces in which they perceive gendered power to be (re)created. Further, in the space of the construction or telecommunications industries, the idea that networking among women would help was questioned. For Pat it was about who holds power and how the gendered, spatial and temporal dimensions of male networks seem resistant to change.

Care across time and space

As noted earlier, there is a gendering of time which is both about physical realities and the valuation of time. The very pressures of women's lives as mothers, partners and workers did impact on their ability to negotiate career pathways and was often critical in decisions to make change.

He [husband] is always away. He was [away] when our daughter took her first steps and [again] when she lost her first tooth. It has been like that all along. Now she is more independent but I need control over time. So this is lovely [own business] as I can do two days a week. I don't regret for a second [did not stay as employed person] but I haven't realized my potential. Part-time workers are valued less and yet I am probably more valuable than many full-timers ... I look back [at work and life experiences] and I haven't understood how much I was being exploited. (Heather)

Heather explored the ways in which becoming a partner in marriage with someone who travels all the time and then having a child necessitated compromises, such as part-time work. However, employers often interpret part-time work as non-commitment to the organization or to one's own career in management, even though women themselves feel otherwise (Jyrkinen and McKie, 2011). Heather had to balance work with the care of her child, a common phenomenon as care responsibilities remain strongly gendered (McKie *et al.*, 2008). She emphasized the need to be in 'control' and have a sense of autonomy over how she could manage time and space in her

working life. Being an employee had brought pressures and parameters that she was glad to stop.

Sometimes the movement between work and family spaces has been both frequent and intense, as in the case of Phyllis, who describes breastfeeding on her return to work:

My husband would come along with the baby and sometimes bring her to the [conference venue] to be nursed or else I would go to the hotel to nurse during breaks. (Phyllis)

Phyllis looked back at the broad sweep of her career noting that she had also cared for her elderly parents before they died. They lived some distance away and this entailed extra travel for her. She summarized the spatial-temporal care shifts over her career as

no matter what kind of work I've done or when I've studied, I've always had a family and children and later on also parents to take care of. (Phyllis)

In her mind — and in that of all the interviewees — the locales of care were sometimes immediate, memories, or anticipations of care needs. Whether it was children, parents, older relatives or friends, all the women spoke of experiences of co-presence of care for others in both physical and virtual ways. In the case of Phyllis, she opted out of paid employment at a time which suited her work–life issues after having children. Now in her sixties, having run a successful management business for the past 15 years, she reflected on this intense period in her life, wishing to continue her personal development and career whilst caring for her adult child who a few years earlier got injured in a serious accident.

Both Sara and Phyllis spoke of the rhythms of working with maternity leave, returning to work, and then periods of leave to care for others. Their lives were changed through these experiences, and they never returned to the same role or section as previously. Not only has the experience of motherhood changed them as individuals, taking time off work to care for others was also empowering, although often seen as a deviation from the 'real' career path, making others perceive them as less ambitious and committed.⁵ Both also had periods of time in freelance work before setting up their own businesses. They noted how that experience, borne out of the necessity to manage family care and time, develop intellectually, and generate income, had made them think about the possibilities of opting in to their own business. Reflecting on being childless and single, Cate comments:

If I was a mother you'd be getting very different answers from me ... the change I'd like to see is in men's behaviour ... values, upbringing, culture, behaviour. (Cate)

Women also anticipated the gendered nature of temporal-spatial shifts over the life course. A common anticipation was cited by Sara, who commented that 'while my parents are still doing fine, I see a time in the future when I will need to care for them.' Whilst the women were opting into entrepreneurship as a means of achieving personal space to develop, they also recognized the

inter-play of work and care was omnipresent. Caring for others remains highly gendered with major implications for working and family life on a daily basis and over weeks, years, locations and organizations.

The best of times

The landscapes of careers were illustrated through the narrative of Cate, who in her 40s had set up a media consultancy. In her interview she referred to 'turning points' over four inter-locking stages, namely:

Start of career: My parents couldn't afford for me to go away to university ... It was not economically possible ... So I ended up back home at a local college ... I had a project with industry ... I had to negotiate with people. Then I realized I had skills in analysing, questioning, getting people on board ... and problem solving. I realized [my skills] ... it was a big turning point.

Early career: ... In late 20s ... found an industry, which is my passion ... [cinema and TV] and I took the organization from a social network to a powerful one. You get the funding, you find the talent, you find the director, you find the story.

Mid-career: ... The next turning point was a few years on with a lawyer's firm ... my problem solving passion ... convinces staff of the need to re-structure ... and I became a management consultant in strategic change.

Late mid-career: ... So the older I got, the better I got and the more I was able to convince people of my experience. And with men running companies I knew I needed great humility to tell them what was going wrong and how to change this. [plus] I mean sadly in a man's world being attractive helps ... being charming ... and then there is compassion for people and organizations. Passion and brains isn't bad. (Cate)

In the final quote Cate draws upon her memories of experiences to reflect on how she manages male colleagues and will develop her working style; in addition to the quality of her work, she notes humility, attractiveness and charm. Cate also draws attention to women using their stereotyped images to the benefit of their company. When she spoke of her media business her energy and passion were effusive:

The best work is ahead of me now. And there have been stepping-stones along the way; increasingly large and higher steps. I feel I am in the right place at the right time. And I know I can overcome the anger [at being passed over for a job by a male applicant] and have come to a peaceful place where I can evolve into the best years. (Cate)

Samantha, in her 50s with a teenage stepchild at home, had established a management business. Coming from a wealthy background, she gained experience through membership of the board of the family company, and becoming the chairperson of the company in her mid-career. The strength of her economic background allowed her to take risks, including freelance work.

Her own business, she asserted, offered her 'space' and freedom from what she felt had been discriminating and unpleasant work contexts. Sara spoke in similar terms, noting that there are always multiple dimensions to a career:

I feel now is the best time, I have experience, vision and am still in good shape. [But] ... there is always some aspect of a women's life that is seen as negative; either you have children or family commitments to juggle or you are too old, there is always something that isn't perfect. (Sara)

The progress to achieving the best of times was, as Cohen *et al.* (2004) note, iterative. For example, Pat spoke of three key triggers to career development:

Start of career: I needed something intellectually challenging. My uncle got me into sales. The quality of training was so professional it gave me confidence that I didn't know I had ... a bit of me fell in love with training because I saw what it could do.

Early career: [a few years on] I think the turning point was Margaret Thatcher in that she was the first truly powerful woman ... she was so successful ... and other people like Anita Roddick [late owner of The Body Shop].

Mid-career: ... this manager invested a lot in me and helped me to discover how to communicate with people, to manage difficult situations, how to select the right person for the right job ... He was excellent and I kept a bond that lasted for several years. (Pat)

Through these inter-weaving stages, which include a range of spaces from the workplace to the wider political and business contexts, Pat gained confidence as well as skills. The final trigger to opting in was the push of redundancy to the pull of greater self-autonomy. Rather than look for another job, she decided to set up her business gaining greater control over time as well as the application of 'wisdom, experience and authority'. Thus the turning points or critical moments are emotional experiences for these women, but the opting in was a rational, carefully considered choice to regain control of their working life, allowing full use of their skills and capabilities. The earlier negative experiences as well as often draining emotional labour (see Hochschild, 1993), which in gendered organizations and in care for others is often performed by women, had prepared the women to encounter new challenges, enabling positive energy and empowerment.

Conclusions

Opting out of paid employment to opt in to their own business is the route chosen by the six women examined in this paper. Having considered their career landscapes, noted the rhythms of life, careers and wider contexts, this is a positive option for them. As the guest editors note, a lot has been written about the atypical nature of many women's careers; contradictions, inconsistencies, barriers, opportunities, anticipations. The work of Acker (1990) has been important in any consideration of women's 'frayed careers'. She has argued for the need of a transformation of attitudes and cultures

towards work, life and organizational practices. Organizations, she asserts, that would take into account the needs of women would

probably require the end of organizations as they exist today, along with a redefinition of work and work relations. The rhythm and timing of work would be adapted to the rhythms of life outside of work. Caring work would be just as important and well rewarded as any other; having a baby or taking care of a sick mother would be as valued as making an automobile or designing computer software. (Acker, 1990, pp. 154–5)

It is our contention that careerscapes offers a framework to identify rhythms and helps us to redefine the organizations of the 21st century. For the women in this paper, the 'redefined' organization was their own business. And opting in to that came about through looking back on the gendered nature of workplace experiences; reflecting on how their personal and home lives interwove with the requirements and realities of working lives, and turning points when temporal and spatial issues collided and forced points of reflection and change. These multi-faceted processes are neatly summarized by Heather as 'tightly closed buds ... opening into flowers'.

Our data demonstrate that, in addition to the rhythms noted by Acker (1990, 2006), there are three key dimensions to opting out and in, namely, *control* of space and time to avoid gendered hurdles (or hassles) in organizations, *flexibility* to allow family needs to be addressed with limited recourse to others, and underpinning these, *autonomy* to self-determine key aspects of careers. Current policies and practices would seem to limit possibilities for women as these are constructed upon the deeply rooted gendered relations and organizational cultures. By opting out and opting in, women are seeking to create a careerscape which recognizes the bedrock of gender relations and allows for the cultivation of more pleasing scenery through which they can traverse the next stage of their career. Returning to the wider framework of careerscapes, we assert that this offers an approach for conceptualizing and researching work–life that builds upon and develops the notion of frayed and gendered careers.

Notes

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2. In writing up, we have deliberately chosen to use the term 'manager' when referring to the interviewees' positions, instead of specifying their position such as 'leader' or 'top manager' in order to preserve anonymity.

3. In this paper we have limited our focus to general themes related to age, gender and gendered ageism, and will report, for example, possibilities of and challenges for organizational policies and practices in other articles.
4. The interview recordings were anonymized before the transcribing. An agreement of confidentiality was made with the transcriber.
5. Research has shown that long maternity leaves, for example, work as a barrier to equality, as they take the woman out of the workplace for a period of time (León, 2009).

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